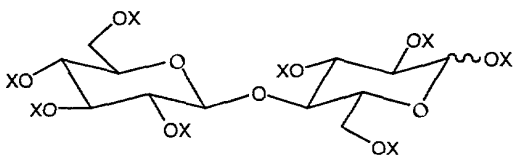
Such an ester herein in which R differs from R' is sometimes referred to as a CHME.

Such materials, ie CHMEs, demonstrate an excellent combination of properties rendering those materials particularly suitable for structuring or thickening water-immiscible liquids, enabling them to be employed in the manufacture of base gels for cosmetic or medical actives and particularly for translucent base gels. The benefits accrue by selecting substitution R' at the anomeric carbon which is different from that of the other alkyl groups R.

For example, by comparison with the employment of various cellobiose octaesters, advantageously, improvements in one or more of the following properties can be seen, namely clarity, thermal stability and resistance against in situ crystallisation, whilst not sacrificing hardness.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for the preparation of an acylated cellobiose as described in the first aspect hereinabove comprising the step of reacting an acylated cellobiose having general formula 2



in which X represents an acyl group (R-CO-) or H, H being not more than a minority of X residues and R represents a

saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched chain hydrocarbon residue containing from 5 to 31 carbon atoms with an acylating agent containing a residue R' as described hereinabove preferentially at the anomeric carbon of the cellobiose.

In this aspect, either the hydroxyl group at the anomeric carbon atom is acylated, or the acyl group R-CO- at the anomeric carbon atom is transesterified.

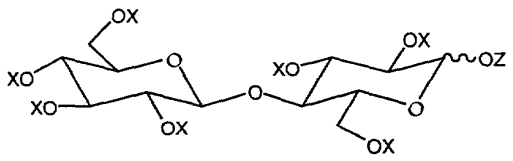
In a third aspect of the present invention there is provided the use of an acylated cellobiose as described in the first aspect hereinabove for thickening or structuring a water-immiscible liquid, thereby forming a cream, soft solid or solid.

In a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a base composition in the form of a cream, soft solid or solid containing a structurant or thickener an acylated cellobiose as described hereinabove in the first aspect.

In a related fifth aspect of the present invention, the base composition of the fourth aspect additionally contains an active cosmetic, medical, or veterinary agent.

Detailed Description of the Invention and Preferred Embodiments

Herein the acylated cellobiose compounds satisfy the formula shown below:



When X and Z represent respectively -COR and -COR' in this formula, R represents a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched chain hydrocarbon residue which contains from 5 to 31 carbon atoms, often up to 18 carbon atoms, preferably from 7 and 12 carbon atoms and especially 8 or 9 carbon atoms. Preferably R residues are saturated and desirably are linear. Most desirably, all R groups are the same. It will be recognised that in practice the alkyl substituent of a specified chain length in an acylating agent can contain impurity levels of isomers or close homologues. For example, when R is nominally octyl, the substituent can comprise as impurities a low proportion, typically not more than 5% of iso octyl and n-heptyl /n-nonyl groups.

In this formula, R' represents an aliphatic, aromatic or cycloaliphatic residue. R' can be alkyl, alkaryl, aryl, or aralkyl, optionally substituted. In many desirable embodiments, R' is non-aliphatic when R is aliphatic.

The residue R' when aliphatic can comprise a saturated or unsaturated, linear or branched chain hydrocarbon residue containing from 1 to 31 carbon atoms, more desirably linear, and preferably from 2 to 22 carbon atoms. The R and R' residues are different from each other, so that R' is often